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AUTHOR Sealey, Robert D.
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ABSTRACT

Declining enrollment forces school districts to cope with many new problems, but also opens the door to new opportunities. A review of the implications of enrollment decline provides deeper understanding of both the problems and the opportunities. Among the major concerns are the disruptions caused by school closures, the new emphases required in planning, increases in financial pressures as income falls while costs remain high, and reductions in teacher morale as reductions in force occur. The major benefits are to be found in the freeing up of space in previously crowded facilities and the opportunities created for schools to try new programs, including those that reach out to the community. Districts must focus carefully on understanding national and local population trends, finding uses for empty classrooms, and involving the community in decision-making (particularly through participation on task forces). The experience of the Highline School District in Seattle, Washington, suggests that careful planning and community involvement can lead to positive results. This review of enrollment decline concerns concludes with several comments by a panel of educators concerning teacher transfer policies, reductions in force, justifications for employing decline specialists, and problems of socioeconomic isolation of schools caused by population shifts. (PGD)

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OSSC BULLETIN

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DECLINING ENROLLMENTS

from a presentation by

Robert D. Sealey

EA 018 108

Oregon School Study Council
Vol. 20, No. 1
September 1976

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DECLINING ENROLLMENTS

from a presentation by

Robert D. Sealey

Superintendent of Schools
Highline School District
Seattle, Washington 98166

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PREFACE

Past conferences of the American Association of Secondary School Administrators have included such subjects as population explosion, enrollment projections, coping with enrollment growth, planning new buildings, and all kinds of topics that had to do with rapid increase in school population. But now there is a new era of population decline in the schools, thus recent AASA topics have taken a reverse bent and include such issues as: building usage, excess teachers, excess staff, RIFing (Reducing In Force), how to close a school successfully (without having the community give you a bad time), or, what programs to develop for smaller groups of children in the classrooms.

This Bulletin presents the overall problem of declining enrollments as dealt with at the 1975 AASA Conference. Both the negative and positive implications of declining enrollments are discussed. Hopefully the message comes through that, once the barriers to change have been removed, declining enrollments can actually provide opportunity for positive growth.

The material in this Bulletin is an edited version of a speech given by Robert D. Sealey, Superintendent of Highline School District in Seattle, Washington at the 1975 AASA Convention, Dallas, Texas. Superintendent Sealey not only generalizes for his audience, but draws from his own experience in the area of declining enrollments, thus giving a first-hand view of the reality of the problems that can arise. Following Mr. Sealey's presentation, panel members were invited to

discuss issues related to declining enrollments. Some of their comments are also included in this publication.

For more helpful information on problems related to declining enrollments, please see the OSSC Fall 1976 Quarterly Report which contains two articles entitled, "Closing a School Need Not Tear Your Community Apart" and "Consolidating Elementary Schools During Declining Enrollments."

This Bulletin was edited from the original materials by Ms. Julieanne Thompson.

Kenneth A. Erickson
Executive Secretary
Oregon School Study Council

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

(from the speech of Robert D. Sealey, Superintendent)

I think that I may have been asked to speak on this subject because in our district we are trying to do something positive in light of what is obviously on the horizon—the problem of declining enrollments. In order to share the basis from which I speak, let me take a couple of minutes to tell you about my background and a little about the Highline School District.

I was fortunate to have entered education at a time when the baby boom was about to explode and the increasing enrollment was by far the biggest concern of educators. Communities were faced with the problems of providing buildings to house the children. Many educational opportunities presented themselves as new schools were being built and new positions being created. During the past twenty-five years, I have been part of the exciting and challenging period of growth and innovation unequaled in previous educational history. I, like so many others, witnessed the growth of a school district from a small, only recently consolidated district surrounded by farm land, to a typical middle-class suburbia that was created following World War II. Our school district became the fourth largest in the state with a peak enrollment of 31,000 students in 1967-68. Highline School District is located to the south of the City of Seattle, bordering on its city limits with Puget Sound on the western boundary. The total population of our school district is approximately 110,000 people. One unique characteristic of

the district is that the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport is located in the center.

What does all this have to do with declining enrollment? In a recent survey by the Educational Research Service, they found that the greatest degree of declining enrollment now exists in the major cities. The second largest area of declining enrollment is located in suburban districts with enrollments of 25,000 or more students. The City of Seattle can attest to these statistics, since the city school system has experienced a decline of from 96,500 students in 1968 to 68,000 students this year. A decline of 25% in seven years. The Highline District supports the second half of that statistical statement as we have seen the suburban decline of over 20%. Even though declining enrollment may be recognized to greater degrees in cities and larger suburbs, at the present time it is a problem that must be recognized by school administrators in school districts throughout the country regardless of the size and location. It is rapidly becoming a fact of life.

GENERAL IMPLICATIONS OF DECLINING ENROLLMENTS; LITERATURE

There are many implications attached to declining enrollments that come to mind, both positive and negative. The major negative issue that consistently comes up is the immediate picture of closing and boarding up the school. After that, how will the community react? The first reaction is usually very negative and uncooperative. Next, what about the staff? Will the teachers who have been transferred or general reduction in force add to the confusion? And, what about the school

board? Will they stick with you through the trauma of indignant citizen revolts as schools are identified for possible change or closing? These are all major concerns, "negative implications," which must be dealt with in a positive and constructive way. The problems are real and frequent, and no superintendents can escape the realization that these problems will likely come their way.

Some of the main positive implications occurring in the declining enrollment era include: First, assuming from statistics that the trend of declining enrollments is not going to reverse itself for considerable time, we are consistently going to have empty classrooms. This means we will have more available space than can economically be utilized by a school district (and we are going to have pressure to do something about it).

Secondly, it will take outstanding leadership and planning to deal with the problem of declining enrollments in a constructive way. This leadership can be generated only from the superintendent. This implies that new skills must be developed by superintendents to handle the new problems of declining enrollment, since they have usually been involved in problems related to <u>increasing</u> enrollment or <u>lack</u> of facility space.

A third, important implication is that declining enrollment can provide opportunities for things to happen that we thought might never come about. It will be possible to grow in such areas as school programs, community activities, and housing for groups most financially burdened.

There are other resultant implications both positive and negative, which declining enrollment holds in store. Because of the difficulty

of the issue (which will be discussed later), one of the most disconcerting implications is that there will be a greater superintendent turnover. Generally speaking, the average tenure now of superintendents is this country is two and one quarter years. Perhaps that's the implication that goes along with just about any problem, not just declining enrollments, in educational administration.

Greater difficulty in financing education is sure to be another problem which will be related to declining enrollments. Such problem areas include tax override, budget approval, special levy, bond issues or whatever you happen to be faced with that requires voter approval; greater community division and conflict and greater pressure from special interest groups, particularly if you are faced with the problem of closing a school. In one respect this is a positive implication in that budgets <u>can</u> be cut, what with a smaller number of students. But just where and how it is to be cut is a serious consideration.

Staff morale is certainly a concern that must be seriously considered because declining enrollment means decreasing staff numbers. Teacher negotiations, RIF (Reduction In Force) policies, class size policies, transfer policy—all must be dealt with carefully. It must be realized that problems of this nature cannot be solved without a great deal of help from the teachers' associations. Reassignment and demotion of school administrators will occur in some cases. Natural attrition, such as early retirement, is a potential avenue for some relief in dealing with decline in staff.

The above are only some of the many implications that I think the problem of declining enrollment holds for all of us. Looking through

literature on the subject is a first step when faced with a declining enrollment problem that is somewhat difficult. Since the issue is becoming more and more applicable to districts, there is more being written. A few of the materials and publications that are now available include:

1. Fewer Pupils, Surplus Space, (May 1974). This is a report from the Educational Facilities Laboratory in New York City: Provides a good historical summary and guidelines for dealing with declining enrollments.

2. Dwindling Enrollment and School Closing. Put out by AASA. This is a filmstrip and tape.

3. Declining Enrollment and What to Do. Also put out by AASA. This is an exceptionally well-devised handbook for school administrators. It identifies a problem, then addresses itself to related spin-off problems which may occur later. Also includes a school closure time-line chart that can assist any district with their long-range planning.

These materials, and others, can aid in giving an overview of the declining enrollment issue and its general implications. In actually solving a unique district's enrollment decline problems, it becomes necessary to "zero in" to the underlying specific implications and see them in light of that district. Next, we'll look at some of these more specific implications.

SPECIFIC IMPLICATIONS

What Are the Projections for Enrollments?

Why are these changes occurring and how can you project this for your own district? We can look at two types of statistics--the actual enrollment figures in schools throughout the nation over the past several years, and second, at birth rates that are presently occurring

throughout the country.

The total enrollment for K-12 schools for 1964 in the United States was 47,015,000. An increase continued through each of the following years until 1971 in which the peak enrollment of nearly 52,000,000 students was reached. 1971 became the turn-around year with over a million fewer students in 1972 than in 1971, and in 1973 again, a reduction of nearly a million more students. The projections are that this trend will continue through at least 1980 with well over two million fewer students in the schools in 1980 than there are today.

A second aspect that can be shown by looking at the national statistics, is that of grade level. It is obvious in looking at these statistics that a decline in enrollment is presently affecting the elementary schools with little effect at the secondary level, yet. Virtually all the decline is registered at the elementary level coming after 1970. Secondary schools, generally (high schools and junior high schools), have continued to grow and will not actually feel the effects of declining enrollments for another year; but then we will see both elementary and secondary declining together for the next several years.

As we look at national statistics of the U. S. birth rate, we find that both a large upward trend and a substantial downward trend have occurred since 1936. During 1936, at the height of the depression in this country, there was a record "low" of 75.8 children per 1,000 women. The peak in the number of babies born was in 1957 when 123 babies per 1,000 women were born. This declined to a figure of 67 babies in 1973. There was a slight turn-around in 1974 with an increase of 3.3 over the previous year. This may in fact be reflecting the leveling off that is

about to occur, or it may be just a slight fluctuation in a continuing downward trend.

Why this change in population is occurring is fairly obvious to everyone. The development of birth control pills, the social acceptance of legalized abortions, the environmentalist concern and pressure for zero population growth, and the economy in its downward turn--have all influenced this trend.

The cause of declining enrollment is not only that fewer babies are being born, however. In most school districts that are located adjacent to a large city or the city systems themselves, the changing residential patterns, as well as other geographic and demographic changes that are occurring, also affect the enrollment patterns. I mentioned we have an airport in the center of our school district, and it is expanding. This accounts for fewer homes and thus, fewer children. Other school districts have been affected by such things as expanded freeway systems and large shopping centers which may take up some of the space previously occupied by homes. Apartment houses are springing up in areas previously zoned for single residences, and condominiums are becoming common in many of the more desirable places to live. Another change that can sometimes be overlooked is what has been called "the empty nest syndrome." Many of the homes located in pleasant, attractive and more affluent neighborhoods are continuing to be lived in by parents who have raised their children and are now comfortable to continue living there alone. This is particularly true in the inflationary economy which now exists. As interest rates continue to go up and the prices of homes skyrocket, there is less and less desire

to sell and relocate in another home.

Looking at national statistics merely warns us that we must look at our own district's population trends and expect similar, but not necessarily the same trends as what is found nationally. Using my own district as an example of the effects of declining enrollment, it became obvious where the growth took place and where we reached the point of turn-around in the population trend. In our district we actually beat the national figures by a couple of years in that 1967 was our peak enrollment with 31,000 children. We have now declined to a figure of 24,000 today and we project a continuation of this trend to a figure of approximately 17,000 in 1984. Another pattern in local districts which also reflects the national trend is that the elementary schools are the ones that have nearly the total decline. Whereas the junior high schools are just now starting to feel the effects of the declining enrollment, and senior high schools are actually continuing on an upward trend and will be for another three or four years.

What Do We Do With Empty Classroom Space?

Most school districts are going to be affected by a decline in enrollment, and with it, empty classroom space. I view this as a very positive factor. When the baby boom occurred in the 50's and 60's, schools were going up by the thousands and most were built with limited financing. The objective was to get a roof over the heads of the ever-increasing numbers of children entering the schools. Few of these schools were built to meet the actual total physical and program needs then, or for the many new programs that we have added since. For example, we have not always had enough facilities for special service

personnel at the elementary level such as counselors, psychologists, social workers, nurses. Many districts have added a great number of programs through special education, alternative education classes, cross-age teaching and special reading programs. With declining enrollments and the resulting available classroom space, school districts now have the opportunity to house these special programs in a setting much more comfortable than previously existed. Elementary school libraries or resource centers are becoming standard and can now be expanded. Art and wood shop areas, music rooms, and reading centers in the elementary schools can now be established. These are only some examples of uses of extra classroom space. Use of extra facilities can even extend to include adult education classes and other community endeavors.

The Need for Leadership and Planning

Although the primary leadership in the area of declining enrollments should come from the superintendent of schools, this does not mean that the superintendent has to be personally involved in the planning for declining enrollment any more than he must be totally in charge of any other specific program which exists. When a school district is facing decreasing enrollment of three to five percent projected over several years, there is no question about the justification of hiring or assigning the responsibility for planning and supervision of facility construction to a specific administrator. Those involved in tackling the problems of enrollment decrease should realize that the problems of declining enrollment can be even greater than increasing enrollment. The main problem deals with handling a community which will usually

cause more uproar when you "close the school," than when you open a new one. Although it isn't true, somehow to "close a schoolhouse" is, to many community members, like a step backwards: it isn't "progress." A need for expertise on the part of leadership should not be diminished for a moment. Most superintendents have backgrounds in facility planning, building design and such, but only those who have gone through a period of declining enrollment can actually show "credentials" for this kind of leadership. Most superintendents can show you the scars that went with it. When you see the problems of declining enrollment coming, I suggest that you get someone assigned to the problem and let him gain the expertise to deal with it in a truly well-organized management way. We'll elaborate on this in the following discussion.

Involvement of the Community

Again speaking from a personal base, when I realized the turnaround that was occurring in the enrollment patterns in our district, I asked the school board to allow me to bring in a consultant firm to give us the assistance necessary to solve the problem. I had hoped someone could ride in on a white horse, draw up a nice, neat package, present it to us so that we could "place the blame" on him or her when we went to the community and started to implement. However, our school board took a different position, having had previous experience with consultant firms. They said, "Use your own administrative staff, involve the community, and do it yourself." This turned out to be a very good decision in our particular case. We now have an on-going, active and understanding group of citizens that we continue to involve in

discussions and decision making as we deal with the problem of declining enrollment.

The Task Force

In involving the community, it is usually wise to establish a task force for the problems of declining enrollments. In our case, when the school board directed that a staff-citizens task force be formed to investigate and prepare recommendations for dealing with declining enrollments, they suggested that the make-up of the group be as broad-based as possible. The task force was then established with a make-up of parents, students, teachers and administrators. Twelve members were from the community, twelve from the schools, and three were "neutral" resource persons, altogether making a task force of twenty-seven. The purposes of the "task force" committee were outlined and included the planning of a process for developing community awareness; gaining understanding through communication and receiving input; establishing criteria for identifying schools where changes may be considered; and choosing priorities among alternative uses of classroom space. A timeline was established and sub-committees were formed as needed. It was determined that this would be done in as rapid a fashion as possible. The beginning time was April 1st, with the final report to the school board due July 1st, just three months later. About the time our staff was completing the final draft of this task force report, we received the Educational Facilities Laboratory publication, Fewer Pupils, Surplus Space (listed earlier, on page 5). In that publication it was stated that there must be a plan when considering the implications of declining

enrollment. This plan must include five basic steps: 1) A school district must have a set of agreed-upon goals; 2) they must work from a factual base; 3) there must be an analysis of factual data; 4) they should establish a set of possible solutions; and 5) and there should be choices among the alternatives. These five steps were exactly the steps taken by the Highline District Task Force.

The first step, that there must be a set of agreed-upon goals, was taken by the Highline District through year-long re-evaluation of previous Highline District goals. This study was completed in the Fall of 1972 and involved a survey in which 9,000 community people responded. Each of the four major goals for education now have specific objectives developed through teacher participation.

The second step, working from a factual base, was also taken by Highline District. Again, the district had already prepared a master plan in 1971. In this master plan is an attempt to identify major program directions and subsequent facility needs in the Highline District during the ten-year period, 1971-1981. The master plan which was updated in November of 1973, contained specific factual information about schools, their location, their capacity, and adequacy. This plan also contains enrollment projections for each school and cost data related to needed construction of the school district's facilities.

The next three steps which included analysis of factual data, establishing a set of possible solutions, and providing choices among alternatives were done by the declining enrollment task force. The task force first established the criteria to be used for facility evaluation and listed them specifically for investigation. A set of

"weightings" or points were established so a matrix could be developed once each of these areas of consideration had been investigated.

The first overall concern of the task force was adequacy of educational facilities in relation to the quality of education. They answered questions that were directly related to the programs available as well as to space needed for those programs. They looked at operating costs, determining which costs would transfer to another school if pupils were to change schools, and which costs could be eliminated if the building were closed or used for an alternative use. Enrollment, of course, was a major factor in determining these conclusions. Looking at present enrollments as well as the projected enrollments, space available, feasibility of adding students to a building, the task force assessed the decline of enrollment by schools and areas of the district. They looked at the impact of the airport (its expansion and its effect upon the housing surrounding the airport), as well as projected and existing freeways dividing the district.

The task force then addressed themselves to the problem of alternative uses of facilities, again, with weightings attached to assist in determining the best and most logical use of school facilities. If schools were to be used for other than educational purposes, what was the possibility for remodeling or redesign? And what was the capacity of each of the neighboring schools based upon the average of twenty-five students to a classroom and their adequacy as receiving schools? In addition, the safety of students in the location that they would be attending school, the walking pattern and other factors which might influence the health and safety of youngsters were evaluated.

The final product of the task force research was a matrix of weighted points, based upon specific criteria which could serve as a truly factual base for informing the community of differences between buildings when the proper time came. The total points from this matrix also allowed the district to list schools in rank order for further consideration of alternative uses.

We asked the task force to do one additional thing for us and that was to identify what they considered to be the main concerns of the community as related to declining enrollment. It is interesting to note, but with little surprise, that finances was rated by the task force as being the most important factor in the minds of most community people. The task force also thought that the community would rate relocation of students and quality of education as second in importance among the thirteen identified concerns that they were listing. However, later, a survey of the community itself revealed that they felt quality of education was of first importance.

Excess School Space at Highline

After much discussion and input from other community people, the task force at Highline made a list of desirable uses of excess school space. Uses included, in order of priority, fulfilling additional educational needs; meeting community needs; allowing private or commercial uses; and the last in the priority, redeveloping the site. Specific uses for educational purposes that were identified by the task force included special education, federal programs, and supplementary teaching areas.

Special education in our state has become a major concern to many of us. The legislature only last year passed a law requiring total educational opportunities through the public schools for all handicapped children ages three through twenty, regardless of their handicaps. This, of course, has had an impact upon the use of facilities. Now the availability of classroom space makes it more possible to house these youngsters.

Community uses that were identified included, in priority again, youth-related services, educational-related services, governmental offices, and citizen services. Private or commercial use of school facilities was the final area of consideration and included rental and use by various business or industrial organizations. Some schools might fall in the "redeveloping a site" category. Redeveloping the site means closing or demolishing a school facility.

Generally speaking, for any district, many alternative uses of available facilities exist. Community centers housing activities in art, music, dance, and drama would add to the total health of the community. All too often, little space is available to those who wish to participate in these cultural activities. Empty classrooms might well provide for community activities in the arts, thus building a more solid link between school and community—usually difficult to attain.

Other uses might include day-care centers, senior citizen centers and governmental centers in which many services can be provided in a neighborhood atmosphere. These services would include water districts, sewer districts, licensing division, military recruitment, food stamp services, welfare and employment services.

School Finance

One area in which citizen understanding is of great importance is the area of school finance. Unfortunately a school district budget does not decline in direct proportion to the decline in enrollment. Also, inflationary costs are increasing faster than any offset we might realize from enrollment decline. At Highline we have had from ten to fifteen percent increase in inflation in almost every category in the past year. There have been salary increases for employees, and state support throughout the nation has not begun to keep pace. There are other costs that are very slow to change. Transportation is a good example. It doesn't cost any less to put fifty students on a bus than it costs to put seventy on a bus. So until we can reduce entire bus runs, you will not make a great deal of saving in transportation. The same thing is true in food services, where it doesn't cost a great deal more to prepare 130 lunches than it does to make 100 lunches. It doesn't cost any less for a custodian to sweep a room that has twenty-three students in it than one that has thirty students in it; it still takes eighteen minutes. So the slow decline of enrollment does not bring about savings in the food service operation, and in the maintenance and operations area. Facts such as these need to be looked at carefully in the area of school finance, and conveyed to the community as school enrollments go down.

Results From the Task Force

With Highline District, the final report of the task force on declining enrollment was presented to the board with recommendations

for implementation to be made in four phases: The first phase was to increase the general public awareness and understanding of declining enrollment. This we have been doing through seventy-eight public meetings as well as written articles in newspapers and school publications. During this phase a questionnaire was used to seek input from those attending these meetings and through the cross reference with the public. The task force list of community concerns proved to be almost totally accurate. The questionnaire revealed that quality of education ranked higher than finances in the public view, even though the task force thought the community would rank finances as first in importance.

The second phase was to offer opportunities for the public to express opinions, make suggestions and ask questions. This is the feedback aspect of this four-phase process and again, is accomplished with meetings throughout the community. It is important to ask the community their feelings and attitudes as well as to find out their wishes for the use of unused facilities. Our community was also given a promise that the staff would return to again meet with them if the school was to be considered further for an alternative use.

The third phase was to send input directly to the school board for their weight and analysis before making the final decision for alternative use of school space.

And the fourth phase was that of keeping the community informed of these decisions while they are being made and while they're being carried out. Basically—keeping a constant communication link with the public.

In Sum . . .

This school-community process of dealing with declining enrollment cannot be formulated into a simple package. It is a process that must be continued as we analyze data, keep the community informed, explore different options that are available and hope that the community understands and is receptive to educational and cost-saving alternatives that are developed. Although dealing with the problem of declining enrollment is certainly a challenge, it is one that I believe can be capitalized on to accomplish much in education that has not been possible before. But it cannot be emphasized enough the fact that community involvement and input are necessary in tackling problems associated with declining enrollments. I think that without it, the superintendent, his administrative staff and his board will have difficulty surviving as we face the problems of declining enrollment.

A concluding thought is that we must not only see the problems of other districts, but we must also see the "uniqueness" of our own districts and solve our problems accordingly. Cyril Sargeant, Professor of Educational Administration at the City College of New York, and consultant for the Educational Facilities Laboratory, says in an article on the subject of declining enrollment, "No two human situations are ever alike. Our knowledge systems and our ways of doing things are based in large measure on finding similarities, making categories, and using these commonalities to determine our actions. We tend to search for likenesses and rely on them as a basis for decisions. We need, however, constantly to remember the uniquenesses of events, factors and situations and to search out these uniquenesses as well as similarities."

The final report of our declining enrollment task force is available for those who would like to write for a copy.* I think by sharing *we are all going to learn as we move through this serious problem.*

PANEL MEMBERS COMMENT . . .

The moderator on the panel, Dr. Homer O. Elseroad, Superintendent, Montgomery County Schools, Rockville, Maryland, raised questions regarding declining enrollments for comment and discussion. Members of the panel included: Edward E. Fields, Associate Superintendent, Kansas City, Missouri; Merlin A. Ludwig, Superintendent, City Community School District, Iowa City, Iowa; Thomas Michael, Superintendent, Burlington (near Boston), Massachusetts; Marv Nottingham, Professor of School Administration at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles; and Keith B. Walton, Superintendent, East Whittier City School District, Whittier, California. The following questions were raised for discussion:

1. Do you transfer teachers out of schools with declining enrollments on the basis of seniority--and if you do, do you end up with a school having a lot of older teachers?

2. What are your experiences in RIFing (Reduction In Force)?

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*Mr. Robert D. Sealey, Superintendent
Highline School District
15675 Ambaum Boulevard S. W.
Seattle, Washington 98166

Cost of a copy of the task force results is $5.00 which includes mailing. This publication has been used as a model for districts, nationwide, dealing with the problems of declining enrollment. The model still leaves room, of course, for the unique problems of a specific district.

3. How can you justify specialist staff for analyzing declining enrollment to the community?

4. What about socio-economic isolation? Is that factor aggravated by declining enrollments?

1. Do you transfer teachers out of schools with declining enrollments on the basis of seniority--and if you do, do you end up with a school having a lot of older teachers?

Mr. Walton

One of the things that I found when I arrived at my district about three-and-a-half years ago was that the district had been declining for a number of years and the schools which were losing staff were losing staff members who were most recently employed in the district. This meant that the staffs of some schools were getting older and older. I found that situation untenable and began working with the teachers' association. We tried not to be brutal about it but we were firm, and we did a lot of talking. It takes a lot of time but it is worth it. The younger teachers are with you on this because they see who is going to leave. If you get them on your side, at least you don't have all the teachers against you. Overall, if the schools are for the students, which I believe they are, then we have got to arrange our staff so we meet the needs of those youngsters--and youngsters need a variety of teachers of all ages, and teachers who don't just "stick around" because they have tenure.

Mr. Michael

The seniority and tenure problem is also related to the problem of certification requirements in the secondary schools. In New York State,

where the areas of certification have been defined by the court as elementary and secondary, teachers have been let go on the basis of seniority alone, at both levels, rather than on the basis of subject area. Since secondary teachers specialize more than elementary teachers, this can cause a great imbalance in secondary teacher personnel. For example, we have situations where language teachers are now having to teach math because of seniority! The language teachers had tenure but not enough math teachers did, so they pulled from the language teachers to create an instant math teacher who had little training in that subject area.

Mr. Fields

In Missouri we know we are going to face this problem. Our state department says that a secondary teacher must be certified in the subject area in which he teaches. However, the teachers' organizations are pushing extremely hard for this matter of seniority. The state law does permit a reduction in staff if the district finds itself in financial straits. The state law does not, however, cover the problem of seniority and certification in subject area in letting secondary teachers go. It is going to be a critical issue. I think we will have test cases very soon in court and we'll see which decision prevails--the education of children or the status of a negotiated package.

2. What are your experiences in RIFing (Reduction In Force)?

Mr. Ludwig

We haven't been able to close any schools at this point. We have

tried. To give you a little indication of our community, we have twenty-one schools with 9,000 students. Our former superintendent was a genius at building schools. Schools are everywhere and our operating expenses are so high that we hoped to close some schools to retrieve some of the money for our salary schedules for staff. We did everything right. We had a blue-ribbon citizens committee representing the community, we informed the community of our problems, we indicated our shortage of funds--that we would have to cut $300,000 from our budget to meet the teacher salary schedule. The report was presented to the school board and we were very unsuccessful.

We have a lot of schools with around 200 students. Upon first arriving at the school district about three years ago, I suggested that we give each principal two schools. Because of the neighborhood school concept, this was met with hostility: Every school <u>needed</u> a principal. When we tried to close schools, the people were very willing to share principals if they could keep the schools, so we were able to accomplish that.

Hearings were held, and they were unbelievable. Rational people became irrational, friends became enemies, and I tried to do what one of my learned superiors once told me to try—focus attention on someone else rather than yourself as superintendent. I tried that, but it always kept coming back to me. Don't think you are going to get out of this by assigning it to another assistant on your staff or to some other committee. It always comes home to roost. The board always turns to the chief executive and asks, "What do you think?" I kept trying to push this off, but it didn't work.

Fortunately, we were able to get more funds. We kept all the schools open, and now we have been able to combine some principalships. This has been proven effective. We have one fly in the ointment, however. We have one junior high school building that must be about seventy years old which I have been trying to close for two years. I did all the right things. I hired a consulting firm. They found that the building had wooden timber walls and didn't meet the state fire code, which looked like we were on the inside track to getting the school closed. There was another fly in the ointment at the board meeting, though. One board member suggested that we ask the State Fire Marshal if the building really was unsafe. The State Fire Marshal came in and said the building is in excellent shape and that it will stand for a long time yet!

It isn't so simple to do everything and get accomplished what you really want to do. And there is another issue that must be considered. In our community we have the traditionalist versus the progressivist and they fight constantly. If a building you are trying to close turns out to be clearly one or the other--a traditional or progressive school--you immediately have a whole can of worms open. I think there are a lot of issues like this to consider; and don't be disappointed if you don't get any schools closed.

Mr. Nottingham

We needed to look at trends before we "RIFed." A common trend is that class sizes become smaller. Obviously that means that costs per pupil rise as your enrollment declines. This is what forces districts

to consider closing schools. Another trend is that the faculty gets older and they get more expensive as they get older. I call that the "squatters' rights syndrome." After the faculty members have been in the high school four years, for example, it becomes their high school. It becomes their hockey sticks and their basketballs, their typewriters and their rooms. You create a major crisis if you change a teacher's room. The transients are the students—as they get older they graduate. As the faculty gets older, they get tenure. It makes it very difficult to change teachers around, as a result.

Another trend is that declining enrollment raises the question of optimum school size at all levels—high school, intermediate school and junior high school. Then the question of excess facilities use comes up. My difference with Dr. Sealey on this point is that in our experience, we do not treat that issue while the task force is studying the problem of declining enrollment. The emotion of just talking about closing a school, any school, is enough at that point in time. Later we talk about how the facility might be used.

Dr. Sealey indicated that financial factors was the most important issue with community members on his task force. This is the same situation with us, the reason being that right now in southern California it costs somewhere between $75,000 to $85,000 to open the doors of an elementary school—without any children or teachers—just for the principal and the support staff including custodians, maintenance, insurance, upkeep and miscellaneous. We say to a school district that if you do decide to close a facility, you will probably realize a monetary return of between (and it's a very broad range) $50,000 - $100,000.

This depends on what you finally decide to do with the facility. One thing you don't do is moth-ball the facility. It's almost impossible to moth-ball a building and not have it vandalized to destruction. As Dr. Sealey emphasized, proper planning is essential wherever a reduction in force or closing a school is going to take place.

Mr. Walton

We have found that an early retirement incentive program has helped us in staff reduction. Pasadena, a neighboring district of ours, as far as I know, developed the plan which we have used which allows certificated staff who have been with the district five or more years to accept early retirement. Retirees have to be fifty years of age; and you can't enter the retirement system or begin to withdraw your retirement until age fifty-five. But we have had a few certificated people who, for one reason or another, wanted to leave before age fifty-five. We have twenty-five teachers and administrators at the present time who are on the early retirement incentive program. We receive twenty days of consultant services from these people during the year, and the person receives up to $4,000.00 for those twenty days of service. It becomes quite a good incentive when coupled with some other factors, and for the past two years we have been able to meet the declining enrollment of about four to five hundred students per year without having to issue letters or let teachers go who have some years of service in the school district.

3. How can you justify specialist staff for analyzing declining enrollment to the community?

Mr. Nottingham

One of the advantages of using an outside consulting team is that they become the butt of the problem and we rapidly learn to be human relations experts, if not declining enrollment experts. Generally we put together a team of people from the community—a task force. I would like to caution you on the composition of that team. It should include teachers, principals, and parents, but it should also include some non-parents. They will bring some rationality to an otherwise highly emotional issue sometimes. Also, when you put principals on the study committee you rapidly find out about the make-up of your management team. You find whether or not the principals in your schools are really the right arms of the superintendent or if they are the left arms with the hatchet. Sometimes their jobs are in jeopardy or they think they will be. It is very hard for them to be objective in a study of this kind.

We have the consulting team identify the factors that they think they want to look at in terms of studying declining enrollment, and almost invariably those factors are very similar to the ones Dr. Sealey has mentioned to you. They include factors related to transportation, the community, special programs, finances, enrollment, physical facilities, and factors related to human opinions on the issue. In studying facilities, we actually take the full study committee to every plant that is being analyzed. We have instruments to quantify all factors (except the human factors). We just talk about the human factors at this point because we haven't figured out how to accurately quantify those yet. We do try to deal with them and at least admit that they

are there; and we realize that they are perhaps the most important overall factor in handling declining enrollments.

4. What about socio-economic isolation? Is that factor aggravated by declining enrollments?

Moderator - Dr. Elseroad

Our experience in Montgomery County is similar in many respects to what has been cited during the panel discussion. One of the most apparent problems that has come up is that of geographical imbalance—call it isolation—as a result of enrollment declines not occurring consistently throughout our county. In one end of the county the enrollment is declining and in the other end of the county, school enrollment is growing. So last year we opened five new schools and this year we will be opening three new schools on the other end of the county. People who don't want the schools to be closed because they don't want their children bused away say, "Bus those children in from the other end of the county and then you won't have to close our schools!" That's a little bit of a unique situation.

In closing this discussion, I would like to thank the panel members for giving their experiences related to this problem of declining enrollment.

EDITOR'S SUMMARY STATEMENT

From looking at what various school administrators have to say about declining enrollments, it is apparent that the problems related

to this new "declining enrollment era" are not easy to solve. It is hoped that this Bulletin exposed the problems through the real experiences of superintendents and administrators, and showed that, once these problems are solved with all persons involved—school staff, administrators, students, parents and community—the "era of declining enrollments" presents an opportunity for space, thus positive growth. This space, in turn, is more space for children in the classroom; for new educational programs which could not have been developed before, due to lack of space; for community members to use for adult and community learning centers and programs. In addition to utilizing empty facilities, some budget adjustments can be made. When a community sees these benefits clearly, it will help ease the strain of closing any schools and making other changes related to declining enrollments.

OREGON SCHOOL STUDY COUNCIL
124 College of Education
University of Oregon
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